

CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
SEPTEMBER 6, 2011 – 6:00 P.M.

PRESENTATION FROM THE FRIENDS OF SOMERSWORTH

Members of the Friends of Somersworth representing the group were Nora Malloy, Diane Griffith, Doug Watson, and Linda Chaston. Ms. Malloy made the following power point presentation:

Mission:

The maintenance of the Hilltop School Building as a productive and thriving center contributing to the economic and cultural growth and community spirit of the City of Somersworth while furthering the goals of the City's master plan.

Benefits:

- Increased use of downtown businesses by residents and non-residents.
- Available flexible and widely sought after multi-use community space.

Benefits toward the goals of the Vision 2020 Plan:

- Improvement of Somersworth's reputation as a culturally rich and community focused City.
- Educational and recreational opportunities for community, including lifelong educational opportunities and adult education.

Vision – Phase 1:

- Constructing a mutually beneficial relationship with City management to prepare the building for reuse.
- Forming a public/private partnership between the City and the Friends of Somersworth.
- To define roles and responsibilities in the management and operation of the property.

Vision – Phase 2:

- Reuse of the Hilltop School Building to house independent artist studios leased out per sq. ft.
- Availability of public spaces for community gatherings, clubs and civic groups (policy and rate policies to be determined).

Vision – Phase 3:

Potential use of space for

- Recreation.
- After school programs.
- Classes including but not limited to art, music and culture based classes and adult education and enrichment.

Viability – Phase 1:

- Today's meeting.
- Maintenance of the building in the short term in order to keep the structure a sustained resource.

Viability – Phase 2:

There is approximately 9500 sq. ft. of space suitable for artist studio rental, reserving the cafeteria, library and gymnasium spaces for community group use.

At 50% occupancy

- Approximately 4750 sq. ft. would be rented.
- At \$1.75/sq. ft. (Rollinsford is \$1.92 w/electric), monthly income would be \$8,300.
- Yearly income would be roughly \$100,000.

Viability – Phase 3:

- Ongoing evaluation of ratio of demand between artist studios and community space.
- Continuing conversations with community partners in recreation, education and the arts, would direct phase 3.

Viability – Phase 3:

Potential ideas for phase 3:

- An arts based after school program.
- Adult education and enrichment classes.
- Public art center for music and cultural classes by independent teachers paying a per-use fee for space.
- Recreational opportunities.

Next Steps:

- Sustain the building – utilities.
- Determination of needs for use of space as artists studios (sinks, locks, dividing walls).
- Fire suppression – meeting with Fire Chief on 9/08/11.

Raising of start-up funds through in-kind work and donations

- Grants.
- Loans (City partnership?)

Setting up operational structure

- Property Manager/Operations Manager
- Housekeeping/Grounds Maintenance

Recruiting of lessees and income generation.

Timeline – Phase 1:

Fall 2011

Opening of building for community use.

Fall 2011 – June 2012

Determination of needs, generation of funding, structural work.

Timeline – Phase 2:

June 2012

Rentals: First tenants and income generation.

Goals/Considerations/Discussion:

- Friends of Somersworth has an agreement to collaborate with the City.
- For phase 1, City continues to heat the building and maintain the grounds – snow removal, mowing.
- City partners with Friends of Somersworth to determine buildings needs and accomplish structural adjustments.

Relationship considerations:

- Agreement for initial support for phase 1 with contracted payback during phase 2?
- Leverage for Friends of Somersworth with City contractors?
- Assistance with grant research and writing?

Questions and discussion:

Councilor Jarvis asked if they have any information or knowledge about the Rollinsford Mill, for example how much is leased out?

Ms. Malloy said she does not know. She knows they do have some space available. Some of the folks they have received requests from presently have space in Rollinsford.

Councilor Witham asked if they would see the space as being in competition with Rollinsford.

Ms. Malloy replied in the affirmative. She indicated they have 18 letters of intent (18 prospective artists). They put a few feelers out and it was not hard to find interested people.

Councilor Watman said he is profoundly grateful for the spirit and effort they have put forth. He has followed their meetings.

Councilor Watman said there are many challenges that come to mind.

1. Zoning – the area is in the single-family residential district and the proposal would be a commercial use.
2. Ownership – is it going to be a taxpayer-owned property or a property that is going to be sold to a group?
3. It would be a challenge to convince him that a successful multi-use building would have any impact other than to impact downtown traffic. It is difficult to walk to the area. If it is a magnet to arts and culture he does not see it drawing people to the downtown without adding a lot of traffic.
4. It is a challenge to figure out if there is a need for this kind of community space. In the past schools have always made their spaces available and charged a fee.
5. Adult education would be a wonderful thing. That has been run by schools before, and that kind of partnership would make more sense.

Councilor Watman said he offers these thoughts not to be critical, but just to state what the challenges might be.

Ms. Malloy said they all have some validity. Regarding zoning, she would like them to not forget that part of the building would be for community space. She does not want them to look at it as just businesses.

Ms. Malloy indicated their group has incorporated. They have not gone through the process of becoming a non-profit, but they could do so.

Councilor Witham said that is an area that will need some clarification. Non-profits still need to be in appropriate zones. This is a valid observation.

Ms. Griffith said that is the purpose of this workshop. It is important to keep in mind that there are phases to this. They see some long-term uses for this building for the greater good of the community. The possibility of \$100,000 coming into the coffers should be something that is an enticement.

Councilor Pepin said the bottom line is going to have to be the City owning the building strictly for zoning purposes. The City has done this for the baseball fields at Malley Farm.

Councilor Pepin said this building has been a school, which generates a lot of traffic, so he does not see that traffic would be a problem.

Councilor Pepin feels the group will need help from the City because they do not want to be a burden on the taxpayers. The plan has a lot of hurdles to go through, but unless we sell it to the developer who wants to put 50 apartments there, which he is not in favor of, we need to figure out at this time what we want to do with this building. We do not know yet what the Fire Chief's findings will be, or what his recommendations will be. He would like to see a committee formed consisting of City Council members, staff, and members of the Friends of Somersworth.

Councilor Messier is curious how they came up with the price of \$1.75 per sq. ft. The sprinkler system alone will be about \$80,000. He is concerned about them possibly under-funding the cost per sq. ft. because there will be some capital needed. Infrastructure is a major component.

Councilor Messier said he wishes them all the luck in the world.

Ms. Malloy said \$1.75 per sq. ft. is based on where they see the market, not on what the building needs. When they walk through the building with the Fire Chief they will know more about what is needed.

Ms. Malloy said what they are hoping to hear is that the Council can appreciate the vision they have. She understands the current challenges, but are they willing to take this on as a City? It will take that in order to make this happen.

Ms. Griffith said one of their meetings was with a representative of the national Boys and Girls Club of America. Some of the things they have talked about are fantastic opportunities. They know there are challenges and costs associated with this.

Ms. Griffith said she thinks they have a facility that has a heart to it. They would like to do something with the building for everybody in the community.

Ms. Chaston indicated the Friends of Somersworth has over 80 people on their mailing list. They also have people such as plumbers and contractors who are willing to come and donate their time. They feel like they can handle some of the challenges, but some they cannot handle without the help of the City Council.

Councilor Witham said he applauds their vision and hopes they can get to a point where these things can happen.

Councilor Witham said they will need to address sustaining the building over the winter months sooner rather than later. He does not think the current budget has any money to put into this building.

Ms. Griffith said that fundraising would be a possibility. Instituting the resident tax would be another. Moving forward, generating some rental space would be a way of coming up with money to do what needs to be done to the building.

Councilor Watman said it is a good vision in the long term. You are asking for a commitment to support a partnership. He would like to know how much they are going to need, and when? He does not know what they are looking for. There is no extra money floating around anyplace. Once he got some figures it would help clarify for him what the partnership will be and who will shoulder the burden.

Ms. Griffith said that based on Vision 2020 and the Master Plan, the Council has made a commitment to this. She encouraged them to revisit what they have committed to in the past. The Friends of Somersworth want to work with the City.

Councilor Jarvis recommended that this be brought to the Economic Development Committee. It would be good if some staff as well as some Council members as well as a couple members of their committee could meet by the end of September or the beginning of October. They could start to work together.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane M. DuBois, City Clerk