

TOWN of RIDGEFIELD CITIZENS COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 22, 2016

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:30 P.M.

Present: R. Larson, A. Behymer, E. Burns, D. Daughters, L. Hanley, M. Miller, T. O'Connor, E. Tyrrell, J. Zawacki

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Public Comments
3. Timeline/Process for Completing Project
4. Review of Comments to the Second Survey
5. Approval of Minutes for February 1
6. Next Steps

1. Call to Order – R. Larson called the Citizens Committee Meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.
2. Public Comments – There were no comments from the public.
3. Timeline/Process for Completing Project
R. Larson stated how it is now time to finish up on our input from the public. What should we do about the building development side? 30% of the respondents to the survey expressed the desire for a return of the original purchase price. How is the Town going to pay for the development of the cultural option? Should the cultural option become a reality thru the expenditure of tax dollars?
4. Review of Comments to the Second Survey
R. Larson indicated that all the comments have been reviewed and classified. Many people expressed support for the cultural option but suggested some modifications. There were comments about possible traffic concerns. Does the cultural option duplicate some of what we already have available in Ridgefield?

R. Larson reviewed the chart detailing “Suggestions for Modifying the Culture Option”. This chart covered Amenities such as Restrooms and Refreshment Stands; Parking options such as a shuttle from parking areas to the site and a possible parking garage; Alternative uses for the PJB Building; Demolishing the Sky Dome (thinking about this option); Outdoor stage – concerned about noise – would need some structure to manage this; and Other – which included suggestions for options that could be added later.

R. Larson reviewed the chart detailing “Suggestions for Modifying the Land Bank Option”. Nothing really needs to be done regarding the Land Bank Option.

D. Daughters and M. Miller reported on the “Concern About Duplication of Other Venues”. The outdoor stage/auditorium does not duplicate the Ridgefield Playhouse or Barn.

Next discussed was “Concern about how to fund the Cultural Option”. Cost would be a combination of private sponsorship and public funding. Public funding over the long term would be supported from tax revenues from the two Schlumberger properties already sold and potential, limited development in the 12 acres. It was suggested that the Town would look at this expenditure in a totally different way if the use of the two buildings was determined and revenue was coming in. The town would then have the funds to go ahead with the other plans for the property.

M. Miller stated how we are not discussing something for the short-term. We are discussing what is feasible on this property for many years to come. She thinks it is important to recoup more of the Town’s investment in the property. The people who come to a charrette and/or complete the survey are the people who feel strongly about an issue. Others are “content” and don’t care that much one way or the other. There are some residents who want to use the property. We need to keep the Philip Johnson Building and the auditorium for now.

D. Daughters stated how we need to first work on what we are going to suggest for use of the Philip Johnson Building. He believes strongly that there is a market out there for use of this facility. He proposes putting together a group (committee) to make this happen. A foundation could be developed for a museum to display and/or store art. Six years ago there was a group that wanted to develop a Cultural Center for Youth. We need to research who this group was and see if there is still an interest there.

T. O’Connor stated how we need to present a “vision” based on our study. D. Daughters asked to what depth should our recommendation go? If we have a vision, then we need to be able to present the steps needed to make that vision a reality. E. Burns asked what do we talk about – how much do we get involved?

R. Larson stated how there is this a theater group interested in the auditorium. They are a professional Broadway group and would like to start this summer. They would need a lease. This would be revenue coming in and they may be interested in purchasing the auditorium. A. Behymer stated how keeping these two buildings vacant is not at zero cost to the Town.

There are the individuals who live in a Philip Johnson house and are interested in purchasing Ridgefield’s Philip Johnson Building to use as an office building and/or a museum. Our Philip Johnson Building was designed to be a commercial building. People want to save it because it is an historic building. Having the building return to its commercial use would help to raise funds. A. Behymer

indicated how we need to find someone to take the Philip Johnson Building off the Town's hands. E. Burns suggested a 99-year land lease instead of an outright sale of the building. The auditorium and the Philip Johnson Building are connected. How do we separate the two buildings if we want to sell them to two different owners? We are talking about the cultural option. The history of the Philip Johnson Building is cultural in character. T. O'Connor and D. Daughters are in agreement that the Committee needs to "present the vision".

What about the possibility of the outdoor stage? We need to set up a small group to develop and be devoted to this idea. How does one bring this idea "to life"? We need to contact other theater groups.

J. Zawacki stated how we can lock in the use of the property only for cultural and recreational activities. Or, it may be most prudent to land bank the property. What are the pro's and con's of each of the three options. We have the data now. If we want to pursue the Cultural Option, then this is what we need to do. M. Miller responded how there is not really enough enthusiasm about the Municipal Option. We just know there is not much vacant property in Town.

D. Daughters expressed the need to sell our vision as an entity – an all-inclusive type of facility – a cultural center for the town where residents can come to picnic, bike, hike, listen to a theater production – all at one location. R. Larson stated how to make something like this come to life, an advisory group would be needed. D. Daughters stated how one man at the charrette stated how he could picture opening up the paper and seeing an article about how Ridgefield opens up the greatest cultural center in the State of Connecticut. E. Tyrrell pointed out how implementation of this "vision" is not going to happen all at once. We cannot build everything right from the start. D. Daughters suggested learning about cultural centers in other towns.

E. Burns shared her research relative to possible CHIRP concert relocation. She contacted the downtown merchants thru the Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Merchants Association with a survey on how the Ballard Park concert location affect their business. The response was that people attend the concert but do not do shopping at that time. Parking is a problem on concert nights. Concert-goers use the Library for parking but that creates a conflict with the Prospector Movie Theater. There were comments that the merchants would appreciate having the concerts move to the Schlumberger property.

R. Larson discussed the possible traffic situation at the Schlumberger location; he will follow up with the Police Chief and Police Commission

5. Approval of Minutes for February 1

E. Tyrrell moved and A. Behymer seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the February 1, 2016, Citizens Committee Meeting. Motion approved by unanimous vote.

6. Next Steps – R. Larson shared a PowerPoint listing of “Steps to Complete the Project”.

- 2/22 Agree to Timetable
Agree Preliminary Direction for 3 Options
Confirm Survey
- 2/23 Publish survey
- 2/27 Saturday visit to Schlumberger Site – Meet noon by Sky Dome – use main entrance road
- 2/29 Information Session with groups expressing interest in the property
- 3/28 Complete Direction on Additional Homes, Auditorium, P&J Building, Sky Dome – Review Outline & Agenda of Workshop Presentation
- 4/28 Develop Plan to Communicate Workshop – 6:30 to 8:30 – Hold Public Workshop at Rec Center
- 5/2 Final vote on recommendations – Draft Report Review

E. Burns expressed her concerns about meeting with various developers on 2/29. She wants some structure to the meetings. She doesn't want the Citizens Committee to sound like Planning & Zoning. We don't want a sales pitch. She shared a large map of the property for the Committee members to locate the possible location of the outdoor theater, the parking, building sites for housing, etc., and what will be the proximity of these locations to one another. What about taking down the Sky Dome? That would open up an additional 1 ½ acres. D. Daughters stated how we are not going to endorse anyone – we are a fact-finding committee. We are wondering about the suitability of any of the possible locations for additional housing development. T. O'Connor stated how we do not know the value of the proposed locations. What will be the impact of the Cultural Option on the property? R. Larson indicated that he will manage the conversations with the developers.

R. Larson suggested a site visit for this coming Saturday, February 27 at noon, meeting by the Sky Dome. A site visit will help answer many of the Committee's questions and will show we are doing our due diligence.

7. Adjourn – **E. Tyrrell moved and E. Burns seconded a motion to adjourn the Citizens Committee Meeting at 9:35 p.m. Motion passed by unanimous vote.**

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson