

Session 18-07 a Regular Meeting of the Homer Education and Recreation Complex Task Force was called to order by Vice Chair Reiss at at 3:00 p.m. on September 25, 2018 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

PRESENT: Task Force Members Derry (telephonic), Haines, Knight, Lowney, Matthews (arrived at 3:55 p.m.), Reiss, Slone

ABSENT: Marks

STAFF: Deputy City Planner Engebretsen
City Clerk Jacobsen Jacobsen

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Vice Chair Reiss asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

LOWNEY/SLONE SO MOVED

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT

Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

The Audience may comment on matters on the agenda not scheduled for public hearing 3 minute time limit

RECONSIDERATION

SYNOPSIS APPROVAL

VISITORS (5 minutes)

A. Asia Freeman, Bunnell Street Arts Center

Asia Freeman, shared that she grew up in Homer, went to middle school at what is now the HERC building, and she's excited to be part of the community discussion. She has participated in a few different creative place making projects and talked about its role in national revitalization of old buildings and public spaces. In the last 10 years, nine national foundations and banks have partnered to lead the way for community development by offering grants to private non-profits for regeneration of public spaces. She provided a handout showing some projects that have been done nationally and internationally through the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) and talked about ArtPlace America and their website

where their projects can be viewed www.artplaceamerica.org . With both organizations there are dozens to hundreds of examples of disinvested or dilapidated public buildings being regenerated through grants, low interest loans, and gifts of the city to non-profits, to regenerate these spaces.

She addressed examples in Alaska:

- The Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka, whose national historic landmark buildings were established in 1911 was transferred to the Sitka Fine Arts Camp. It became a civic anchor for commerce structured around a summer fine arts camp and additional renters including the Greater Sitka Arts Council, Sitka Summer Music Festival, Yoga Union, two preschools, and a significant residential property that is rented out. The conditions of the buildings included no plumbing, not heat, extensive mold, leaking roofs, and dangerous electrical situations. The Fine Arts Camp owns the property, earns revenue through the rentals, and has an operating budget over \$2.5 million annually including capital projects for maintenance. The strategy used has been volunteers and grass roots fundraising to leverage other funding in the form of foundation and grant support.
- Cyrano's Theater in Anchorage was the Grandview Gardens Library and Cultural Center, constructed in 1937 at the corner of Debarr and Bragaw. Previously it was occupied by Out North Theater. Out North was the first organization to from the city lease it for a dollar a year when the city decide not occupy it any longer for municipal purposes. Cyrano's occupies it under the same terms, with the city holding the deed. Cyrano's is obligated to use it for arts, recreation, and educational purposes. When Cyrano's moved in it was suffering from years of deferred maintenance and damage, including a leaky roof. Many of the repairs and fire code updates have been paid for with grants and their general funds. They've upgraded the sprinkler system, heating systems, installed roof drains, replace flooring, and secured architects to submit space drawings to the fire department including occupancy loads. It's an economic and cultural engine in Anchorage that employees dozens of people and presents outstanding programs that make the Airport Heights area a dynamic place to live.
- Cook Inlet Housing Authority is working on a similar project at the corner of 36th and Spenard. She is consulting on the property, which is a Methodist Church that was built in the 50's. CIHA acquired it for additional parking and left the church for a few years while they considered what to do with the property. CIHA was approached by some artists who were interested in using space to develop some projects, and they were allowed to do their projects, which enlivened the neighborhood which for many years has been considered diverse, unsafe, and scraggly. They received a \$3 million grant from Rasmussen Foundation with which they are using for redesign, remodeling, and programing the space. As they do that and cultivate neighborhood festivals that connect people in a safe environment with programs that range from choir to kung-fu. It's interesting to see how that neighborhood is becoming stronger and more vibrant.

- The Bunnell project got started in the late 80's with four or five residential properties. Now it's very much organized around the vibrancy of Old Town and activity of the Art Center and there are over 40 residential units with the radius of one city block.

Ms. Freeman in thinking about things could strengthen and meet basic needs in the community, she touched on some things she could see happening at the HERC, including a small business incubator, office space, child care, and tool lending library. She talked with Homer Arts and Culture Alliance, about what they might be able to do together, and they need time to think about what collaborations might look like. The opportunity to consider the HERC for a larger initiative deserves some time and reflection. Another topic that came up in a conversation with a former peninsula resident, John Lamb, was the idea of a maker's space, and whether something like that would be suited to Homer. It's based on a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) program, and his interest is in a similar program that adds the arts, or STEAM. She explained how the program got started in Yakima, Washington and how the program works there with members who pay membership fees to use the facility; and shared some ideas about what it could look like in Homer.

Ms. Freeman explained that the work in community development around a building and a portion of the community that needs some investment and is being generated, for her goes back about six of her 26 years with Bunnell, so she has an awareness of what's out there in terms of grants and opportunity for support to private nonprofits. She encouraged the group to entertain the idea of our community looking at its needs and having some open discussions.

In response to questions from the task force there was discussion on what part the city might play as a lessee, the need for time for assistance from the city for a private nonprofit to establish and become self-sufficient, and a three to five year timeline to get a private nonprofit established with a vision, plan, and funds in place to get started.

STAFF REPORTS & Committee Reports (10 minutes)

A. Julie Engebretsen, Deputy City Planner

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen reviewed the upcoming meeting schedule included in her staff report. She noted the worksessions are scheduled but if the group doesn't have a need to meet they can be canceled. She also reported they will have a 50% draft of the opportunity plan at the next meeting.

PUBLIC HEARING

PENDING BUSINESS (20 minutes total)

A. Operating and maintenance expenses

Mr. Derry said he didn't have any additional information to add from the discussion at their last meeting.

There was brief discussion regarding information Mr. Reiss had but was reluctant to provide based on liability concerns. Mr. Derry commented that he'd be willing to accept the information, incorporate it into his scenario, and he'd assume the liability and include a statement to the effect that these are estimates and additional actual cost estimated would need to be obtained. He added that if the group would find the information helpful he'd be happy to factor it in.

There were comments from the members that they find value in the projected costs.

NEW BUSINESS (10 minutes per item)

A. Follow up from City Council Worksession

Task Force members shared what caught their attention at the worksession. Comments included:

- The potential of putting questions on the ballot regarding demo or using the existing building
- A new building with a gym being a central part
- Space for child care
- Strong interest in a profit/nonprofit scenario
- Two plans, one to utilize the old building and one for demolition the ballot regarding demoing or using the existing building

The group discussed that some of the information from Council is outside what they have been tasked to work on. They also touched on the need for a community conversation to build on a vision for the potential of the space.

B. Follow up on community conversations

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen noted her memo in the packet and said she'd be happy to answer questions.

In response to questions she explained the focus group was not supportive of the city renting HERC space at market rate in direct competition with the private sector. If we were to have

the conversation about having makers space or something not readily available in the private sector, it would be a different conversation.

There was comment that maintaining the building for the next five years would have potential for more users to come in and generate more revenue, and one of the key things that needs to happen is there needs to be a person dedicated to manage the facility.

C. Five year plan

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen said she's looking for input from the group if there is consensus of a three to five year window of using the building as it is and potentially more use upstairs, as opposed to another scenario of closing the building or something else.

There were comments that this five year limp along plan could be incorporated into recommendation 1, can the upstairs be safely used without capital improvements. Concern was expressed that going with the five year plan may result in pushing on to a future council to have to address this again. It was suggested that this plan would allow for basic improvement and usage and at the same time allow for something to be developed, as Ms. Freeman shared in her presentation. The plan addresses immediate needs and gets something out to Council to get them started on a more global discussion with user groups and funding to determine how to move forward with the building.

SLONE/LOWNEY MOVED THAT WE INCORPORATE BARRY'S FIVE YEAR PLAN WITHIN QUESTION #1

It was suggested that the idea of the public private partnership should be interjected into the five year plan as potentially the time period where the city solicits a public private partnership for renovation and occupancy of the building.

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen noted the public private partnership can be addressed in the opportunity plan, so options can be laid out in more detail.

VOTE: DERRY, SLONE, REISS, KNIGHT, HAINES, MATTHEWS, LOWNEY

Motion carried.

Mr. Derry thanked Mr. Reiss for his work on the five year plan, he thought it was well done and appreciates the work put into it.

D. Next steps

Deputy City Planner Engebretsen reminded the group the 50% draft of the opportunity plan will be at the next meeting, and she asked them to send her their questions for Larry Peek for next week's worksession. There was brief discussion regarding Mr. Peek walking through the building before the meeting, Mrs. Engebretsen said she would offer him the opportunity to do so.

It was suggested someone from SPARC attend as a visitor to talk about whether their land is suitable for expansion or what their long term plan is. Ms. Lowney said she would follow up with SPARC and report back to the group.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

The Audience may comment on any item. 3 minute time limit

Janie Leisk, city resident, said she appreciates the work done by the task force and she appreciated Ms. Freeman's comments. She's familiar with all three projects mentioned in the presentation and it's nice to know grants serve this area as well. She sees the HERC as the gateway to Homer, the building represents an opportunity for the community to build or renovate something for the entire community. It will take time to explore the public private partnerships and she feels a vision of what could be is just as important as the hard cost of fixing up, renovating, or demolishing the HERC. She agrees a community forum is important to look at broader opportunity. She noted a Homer Chamber website quote that reinforces that recreation, culture, and arts really pays and we could do a better job promoting that.

Larry Smith, city resident, commented he has worked in construction for many years and has built one of these buildings for a school in another area. He believes in preserving our valuable building stock. In this case if all else fails, a fall back is a partnership with other public entities for office space.

Asia Freeman, city resident, expressed her appreciation of the recommendation for the five year plan. She thinks it's what is needed to take the next steps, which includes a discussion process with the public to see if we can develop a vision that fits the space and supports the community needs. Our city does a lot to tout the value of arts and culture as a resource in Homer, but doesn't invest in it a great deal, so the idea of making the investment to sustain the building and test uses for a five year period is a worthy investment. Toward the end of that time they should have some credible ideas and strategies for moving forward.

COMMENTS OF CITY STAFF

COMMENTS OF THE TASK FORCE

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Task Force the meeting adjourned at 4:56 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for October 9, 2018 at 3:00 p.m. at the City Hall Conference Room located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

MELISSA JACOBSEN, MMC, CITY CLERK

Approved: _____