

Minutes
HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD
City Commission Room, City Hall
1101 Poyntz Avenue
Monday, November 26, 2018
4:00 p.m.

Members Present: Betty Mattingly-Ebert, Chair; Craig Hager, Vice-Chair; Cameron Tross; Kevin West; Eileen Meyer; and Ann Kosch.

Members Absent: Jana Fallin.

Staff Present: Ben Chmiel, Planner; John Adam, Sr. Planner; Scott Shoemaker, Zoo Director; Eddie Eastes, Parks Director; and Jason Hilgers, Dept. City Manager.

Others Present: Mel Borst, Kathy Dzewaltowski, and Linda Glasgow.

1. Meeting Opening

Mattingly-Ebert called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm with a quorum and read the public comment policy.

There were no public comments.

Tross moved to approve the November 26, 2018 meeting minutes as written. Hager seconded. Motion passed 4-0-2 with Kosch and Hager abstaining.

2. Community House Request for Proposals

Hilgers explained the City received an inquiry from a developer about the Community House (120 N. 4th Street) proposing to purchase and rehabilitate the building. He explained how that sparked interest by the Commission to issue a general request for proposals (RFP) on how the building could be used in the future. Hilgers explained the facility was evaluated a few years ago and concepts for ways to rehabilitate and repurpose the building and tackle its deferred maintenance issues were created. He further explained cost estimates ranged from \$1.9 to \$2.5 million, which has been difficult for the City to budget over the last several years and that selling or leasing the building to a private property could make those repairs and improvements possible through private investment. Hilgers explained the building's historic nature and how that would be taken into consideration with proposals to be solicited, including potential limitations to what could be done to the building. Hilgers then asked for feedback from the Board and for a Board member to volunteer to serve on the RFP selection committee to aid in the process.

Mattingly-Ebert volunteered to serve on the selection committee. She asked for clarification on if the building would be leased or purchased and if maintenance of historic designation was a requirement. Hilgers explained both leasing and selling options would be considered and loss of historic status may not be a disqualifier. Mattingly-Ebert asked about the relocation of current activity in the building. Hilgers said that several facilities including the SENREC, middle schools, and possibly the old City Park offices would be available to house those activities soon enough.

Kosch expressed concern with the timeline for the RFP, stating it was too short to gain more proposals. Hilgers said it could be extended. Kosch also asked if a land-lease would be an option and if a special sales tax could be issued from the property. Hilgers said a land-lease was an option, similar to Manhattan Town Center, and like the mall a special sales tax could be established to help pay for improvements. Kosch said that a lease could prove more protective of the long-term historic integrity of the building. She further explained how the building could be “flipped” by a developer.

West pointed out \$900,000 of improvements stated in the building’s assessment from several years ago and asked why they hadn’t been made. Hilgers explained that it was part of a scope including all parks and rec facilities, which was different from the study specifically on the building’s repurposing. West also pointed out the bond issue passed last year to build new recreation facilities, questioning reason behind potential loss of the recreational space at the Community House in light of that. Hilgers explained that the building currently has issues—in addition to accessibility—accommodating current recreational needs, saying it is only usable for volleyball, a use which has mostly migrated to Peace Memorial Auditorium. West brought up the general issue of deferred maintenance of facilities resulting in limited options for the city in a pattern of acquiring, listing, and neglecting facilities. Kosch concurred. Hilgers explained that this was a city-wide issue and there were many other higher priority facilities with deferred maintenance issues, including street maintenance and public works facilities; to maintain facilities, the city either has to raise taxes or keep deferring the maintenance.

Tross brought up the issue with the building’s limitation to being repurposed due to the historic status, specifically, maintaining the open space of the gym is and that while the building would be more usable were it not listed, that is not currently an option. Mattingly-Ebert concurred. Chmiel added that the building qualified for State Historic tax credits for rehabilitation work, which could be sold for less by the city to help fund improvements. However, if the building became income-producing, the rehabilitation work would qualify for federal tax credits as well, and the state tax credits would not have to be sold for less. He further explained that the building becoming income

producing could make addressing the very expensive maintenance issues more financially viable.

Meyer also expressed concern about the quick timeline for the RFQ and asked if there was a proposal already submitted. Hilgers explained that the timeline would be revisited and that the city had indeed been approached with a proposal.

Hager asked about previous requests for funds by the Board to address some maintenance issues with the Community House. Chmiel confirmed the Board and the Parks and Rec Department put in CIP requests for repairing the windows in the building in 2017 and 2018, but funds were not allocated. Hilgers explained that CIP funds were stretched very thin for the current year and expects next year to be similar.

West asked if the Commission could require the building to maintain its historic designation as part of a proposal. Hilgers said it would be at commission discretion. West did not want to see the building lose its designation. Mattingly-Ebert agreed, asking for the timeline of the RFP be extended and that maintenance of its historic designation be required.

Hilgers explained that the prospect of selling the Community House was not a small task, but given the expense of fixing the maintenance issues and other short-comings of the building compared to the odds of getting funding, taking proposals for private reuse of the building seemed to be a legitimate option for its longevity. Tross stated that documentation of historic designation of the building was included in the RFP and that covenants could be drafted to require designation maintenance in the future. Hilgers explained that the RFP is intended to cast a wide net and get multiple ideas from developers on the potential for the repurpose of the Community House. Kosch asked if the selection committee meetings would be subject to Open Meeting Laws. Hilgers said they would not be.

Mattingly-Ebert opened public comment. Borst asked if a study had been conducted to decide if the building should be used for private purposes. Eastes cited the facilities study Hilgers mentioned earlier whereas the Community House had proven fairly dysfunctional for use compared to other potential and existing facilities. Borst asked if the \$900,000 of projects identified for the Community House would have expanded its usability. Eastes explained that the \$900,000 was more related to accessibility, code issues, and deferred maintenance- not accommodating more uses. Borst described the value of having a public resource like the Community House in the downtown area.

Dzewaltowski noted that in 2012 a survey was conducted to get input for reuse of the community house, including a public survey garnering 1,400 responses. The public opinion at that time highly supported reuse for group fitness, a concert venue, meeting space, retail shopping, and coffee house. As well, the community supported rehabilitation of the building and DMI suggested helping with raising funds. She said the survey results were shared with the Board during the January 2013 meeting. She also hoped that there would be more opportunity for public input throughout the RFP process.

Tross reiterated the challenges with the building's current condition with expensive fixes to access issues, noting that issuing an RFP was a viable option for revitalizing the building through private repurposing and rehabilitation.

Glasgow recalled the discussion of repurposing the Community House in 2013, noting there were several solutions to addressing access issues external to the building. She wanted to see the Community House kept. Glasgow also stated that the Board's meeting minutes should be detailed enough so that specific discussions could be recovered in the future.

Mattingly-Ebert closed the public comment period. There were no more comments from the Board.

3. Sunset Area Historic Resources Survey

Chmiel briefly described the background of the project and the final report resulting from the project. The report concluded all the city-owned property in the area, including the cemetery, the zoo, Girl Scout Park, Sunset Neighborhood Park, and portions of Wildcat Creek Linear Park could be designated as a historic district, and it was the consultant's recommendation to the City to pursue such designation. Chmiel described the resources in each of the areas included in the report, weighing the pros and cons of including the area in a district vs. listing resources individually. He explained creating a district out of the cemetery would make the most sense, while elsewhere it might make more sense to pursue listing of individual structures. Chmiel explained how establishing a district including the zoo might prove complicated given the recently adopted zoo master plan, depicting extensive expansion of the zoo into areas currently programmed. This sentiment was also held by zoo and parks and recreation administration. Chmiel said City Administration was seeking a recommendation from the Board to forward to the City Commission along with recommendations from the Cemetery Board and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.

Tross asked if it were possible to create sub-districts out of a main district, with different limitations, but still composed of all areas. Chmiel said there wasn't really a tool for such a thing, but were everything included in one district, it would probably be understood that different areas would have different limitations independent of each other. He said it would ultimately be at the digression of future Boards to decide whether something happening in one area is unaffected or not by what's happening in another.

Chmiel believed were the recommended district broken down further, only the zoo and cemetery would be able to stand on their own as individual districts, explaining that Girl Scout and Sunset Neighborhood Park would probably need to be included with other districts.

Tross asked if it would make sense to include the Landmark Water Tower in a district. Chmiel explained the consultant didn't include it, possibly due to a thematic discontinuity with the rest of the area, but it could be proposed to be included. He noted the tower was already listed on the National Register. Kosch agreed the tower should be included in a district. She also said the Girl Scout Little House should be listed individually, noting its relationship to other WPA projects in the city, including the Bluemont Youth Cabin.

West asked if the Sunset Zoo Masterplan had been funded. Chmiel noted the northern parking lot had been constructed, but believed fundraising was still taking place for other phases. Shoemaker said Expedition Asia which was previously reviewed by the Board was funded, which included the old WPA exhibits. West asked what was included in the masterplan that could be precluded by a historic district. Chmiel said there was nothing specifically contradicting a district, but the expansion of the zoo was extensive with fairly large projects where nothing is today and a Board in the future may not find it appropriate. He specifically noted the development of Sunset Neighborhood Park included in the masterplan, noting if there is not a whole lot to gain by being in the district in the first place, it may not be in the best interest of the City to designate and risking complications to the adopted plan.

Chmiel explained that the Picnic Shelter would be the only resource in the zoo that could be individually listed as the other identified resources were not old enough or too dispersed. Kosch believed the zoo appreciates their historic resources and would benefit from the aid of the Board and City staff through the establishment of a district. Mattingly-Ebert concurred adding the zoo and Parks and Recreation had been courteous in the past to consult the Board on various projects affecting potentially historic resources.

Tross pointed out the differences in functions between the zoo and the cemetery and questioned whether they would need to be in separate districts to avoid complications. Mattingly-Ebert agreed. Kosch asked what the pros and cons would be of creating one district or two. Chmiel did not foresee any technical issues and assumed a future Board would understand that one area of the district, like Girl Scout Park would be completely unaffected by a project in another area like the zoo. He noted that thematically there was a lot tying the area together, though two separate district were quite possibly an option moving forward.

Hager asked if the Girl Scout House should be individually nominated as a stand-alone site. Chmiel said that would be his recommendation and though it could be included in a district thematically related to the cemetery, it would probably function best as an individual listing, given the layout of the site relative to the park. Hager pointed out the link historic between the Landmark Water Tower and the Cemetery, saying it could be included in a proposed district. Chmiel agreed.

Mattingly-Ebert asked Eastes and Shoemaker for their input on the matter. Shoemaker expressed that he appreciates the historic aspects of the zoo and his only concern for historic designation was the issue with older exhibits that may need to be renovated to meet modern zoological standards. Eastes agreed with Shoemaker, expounding on concerns and unknowns of historic designation and its effect on executing the zoo masterplan.

Mattingly-Ebert called for public comment. There were no public comments.

Mattingly-Ebert repeated the staff recommendation to establish a historic district of the Cemetery, including the Sexton's House, and individually listing the Girl Scout Little House and all possible historic Zoo structures on the State and National Register. West suggested tabling the item so staff could further explore how the zoo master plan would be affected by historic designation. Meyer concurred. Kosch stated she would like to see the Landmark Water Tower included in any district. Mattingly-Ebert and West concurred.

West moved to table the item till the Board's January 2019 meeting. Kosch seconded. Motion passed 6-0.

4. Minor Review Updates

Chmiel presented an approved review for a sign permit issued at 216 S. 4th Street, the Bus Depot Outbuilding built in 1986, replacing an existing wall sign. There were no comments from the Board.

5. Updates & Announcements

Chmiel confirmed the Wolf House Historic District had been listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places and would be forwarded to the National Register for consideration.

Chmiel notified the Board that their future meetings would be broadcasted live on local Channel 3 and would be archived on the city website.

6. Adjournment

Mattingly-Ebert adjourned the meeting at 6:00 pm.