



Wheaton Park District

Wheaton Park District Board of Commissioners Special Meeting
Wednesday May 31, 2017 7:00 p.m.
DuPage County Historical Museum
102 E. Wesley Street, Wheaton, Illinois

CALL TO ORDER – President Vires called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm. Commissioners Fahey, Frey, Kelly, Mee, Morrill, and were physically present. Commissioner Frey was present via phone conference call.

REPORT

President Vires stated that Executive Director Benard would provide a verbal report on the subject matter. The written version of that report is attached as part of these minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ronald Almiron 455 W. Front Street Unit 201 Wheaton, IL

Mr. Almiron stated that he was asking respectfully that the board make this happen. That they do everything they can to get this done. He stated he thought it was less costly and intrusive if the house was moved to the East side of the park (Northwest of the lake). He asked that the board be creative and find a way to get it done.

Joe Cuttone 523 Brighton Drive, Wheaton, IL

Mr. Cuttone stated he lives near Seven Gables Park and has to deal with the soccer games that are played there. He agrees with Director Benard that adding more congestion to that area would not be a good idea.

Lee Murphy 2S220 Hawthorne Lane, Wheaton, IL

Mr. Murphy was concerned with alcohol consumption at events at the mansion. If it's economically feasible that the mansion would operate with no alcohol and only be open from dawn to dusk like the park he might think differently.

Pam Curtain 15 Danada Drive, Wheaton, IL

Ms. Curtain stated that she has lived in Wheaton for 27 years. She was a social worker at Loretto Convent. She loves the house and preserving it would be amazing but changing the house to a venue would not be a good idea. This should have been looked at a lot earlier. This would be disrupting to the kids playing. She didn't think this was necessary.

Barbara Dutton 418 E. Evergreen Street Wheaton, IL

Ms. Dutton stated that she is in favor of saving the mansion.

Richard Babb 111 Palamino Place, Wheaton, IL

Mr Babb stated he has lived in Wheaton for 30 years, and that his wife works at the Wheaton Park District's Community Center. All of his kids were employed by the park district at some point. He thanked the Commissioners for their quick turn around on this issue. He was in favor of land acquisition but he is against the house. He likes the park closed at dusk.

Dennis Coughlin 370 Brighton Drive, Wheaton, IL

Mr. Coughlin didn't think the other venues that were mentioned are good comparisons. He didn't think another venue competing with Cantigny, Arrowhead and Danada were a good idea.

Karen Shallcross

Ms. Shallcross was opposed to the mansion because of the traffic.

Katy Goldsborough

Ms. Goldsborough stated that the preservation group has been working on this for a long time. She thinks the house is amazing and wanted it to be something everyone could experience and enjoy. She stated that the group didn't harass the board about this and they weren't aware that other residents were upset. She was disappointed with this evening's meeting. She stated she thought there was a lack of communication with the park district and that her group was still trying to fundraise. She stated that the preservation group is trying to preserve gems in our community. She didn't think that the house was big enough to have a lot of people attend an event there. She stated that they would like to move the mansion and leave it until funds are raised through a 501c3 and not tax payer money.

Angie Welker

Ms. Welker agreed with Katy Goldsborough. She didn't feel the mansion would be competition for Arrowhead. She stated that she believes people from Wheaton are going to other towns looking for smaller venues. She thought that with volunteers and corporate donors they could raise the money to save the mansion.

Chris Ink, Landmarks

Mr. Ink helped to move a house from Wheaton to Evanston to save it. He worked out a deal with Whole Foods to keep the house on their property for free until they were able to move it. He is in favor of temporarily moving the house until funds are raised to move it permanently.

NEW BUSINESS


Commissioner Mee moved to cease negotiating a contract with the Pulte Group for the acquisition of a building on the Loretto Convent property commonly known as the House of Seven Gables Designed by Jarvis Hunt. Seconded by Commissioner Frey.

Commissioner Kelly stated that he is the Chairman of the Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee. He owns a commercial construction company that does some historical preservation. He felt that this was given to the board too late. Had this been brought to the board three or four months ago it might have been possible. He wasn't in favor of moving the mansion due to the short notice.

Commissioner Frey thanked Executive Director Mike Benard and his staff for doing their due diligence on this. He would have loved to preserve the mansion but due to the short notice and how much money is involved he cannot support it.

Commissioner Morrill agreed with both Commissioners Kelly and Frey.

Commissioner Mee stated that as Commissioners we need to consider how tax payer money is spent. He also thought that the park district has too many other current significant projects that need attention.



Commissioner Hodgkinson stated that this was one of the hardest votes she had to take on this board. She would love to see this saved but a week was not enough time. She thought the board would have needed six months or more.

Commissioner Fahey thanked Executive Director Benard and his staff for the work they completed. He would have liked to save the mansion but there just wasn't enough time. He thanked Katy Goldsborough and the others for their time and effort on this too.

President Vires was intrigued by preserving the mansion but if the park district did this something else in the district won't get built or fixed that is on the list to get done.

Motion passed by roll call vote.

Ayes: Fahey, Frey, Hodgkinson, Kelly, Mee, Morrill, Vires

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:57 p.m., Commissioner Mee moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Fahey seconded. Motion passed by voice vote.


TO: Board of Park Commissioners
FROM: Michael Benard, Executive Director
RE: Final Report – Jarvis Hunt Mansion Investigation
DATE: May 31, 2017



Background

On May 17th I met with a Park District Resident at his request to learn about a local group's planning efforts towards saving the Mansion at the Loretto Convent from being demolished. I have attached to this report relevant background concerning Architect Jarvis Hunt and the history of the mansion for the record. I was informed that a plan was being investigated to move the Mansion to two lots on the soon to be built Loretto Club housing development at a cost exceeding one million dollars (with the intent to then raise additional money to restore and ultimately sell the house on the open market to recoup related costs. During the dialogue, the concept of moving the house 800 feet south onto Park District owned property was suggested as a possible means to save the house at a cost hopefully significantly less than one million dollars and placing it in the public trust via a donation to the park district who would then operate it as an event rental facility with the plan to meet annual operating and preservation expenses. I was asked to share the outline of this proposal with the park board. I agreed to do so with the mutual understanding that it would be a challenge due to the short time frame available, the lack of details on actual expense projections related to identified available resources and my expectation that the residents living adjacent to seven gables park may take issue with the location and added park users to an already very busy Park.

I shared the proposal concept with Park Board President John Vires the next day (May 18) who determined that the concept had enough merit to warrant calling a special meeting of the Park Board to discuss to possibility. The special meeting was called for May 24. I will attach the minutes of that meeting to this report once they are approved by the Park Board later this month. At this meeting, Rob Getz of Pulte Builders provided an outline of the time available for such an effort to succeed which was very short as the house needs to be out of the way by July 10 in order for their construction schedule to be met. It was determined by the Park Board that, over the next week, Staff would finalize a review of the expectation of costs and that Commissioner John Kelly who chairs our Buildings and Grounds Committee and is an expert in construction related matters and Staff would tour the Mansion the following Friday morning to assist in determining costs related to restoration. President Vires participated in the tour as well. A subsequent special meeting was called for May 31, to review the expectation of costs report and a business operations assessment and concerning operating the house as a rental venue at the proposes site on the west end of Seven Gables Park. With the understanding that the remaining portion of the move and restoration cost would need to come from sources other than the Wheaton Park District and the City of Wheaton who had identified a total of 264,000 dollars that could be contributed to a successful efforts if the planets aligned.



On May 25, a short term fundraising goal of \$150,000 was suggested by me to the preservationists group with the caveat the number may likely flex upward. We now know that estimate was very low as you will note on the expectation of costs report available this evening with the total figure of \$1,237,000.

Assistance provided to the Preservation Group

I assisted the preservationist group by providing a Mansion room naming program which if successful generates \$375,000 in giving for naming rights for 10 years. After 10 years, the naming rights would be re-sold generating new money for the preservation of the Mansion. I also requested assistance from our Merchant Processing Firm, Transnational Bank Card who set up a donation portal directing charitable online giving to the DuPage County Historical Museum Foundation which is a 501-c3 whose mission involves preserving and sharing the History of DuPage County. This project is within that mission. I also provided the group with a model pledge agreement document that the park district has used in the past to facilitate long term giving options. If the preservation effort is successful, the Foundation would send the money to the Park District for its use restricted to the Hunt Mansion. If the preservation effort fails, the donations will be refunded. I also forwarded information on the preservation effort to various media outlets. Approximately 40 hours total of Park District Senior Staff time has been spent on this matter over the last week by myself, Director of Parks and Planning Rob Sperl, Marketing and Fund Development Director Margie Wilhelmi, Special Facilities Director Andy Bendy, Arrowhead Events Director Danielle Salerno and Executive Assistants Donna Siciliano and Sherry Krajelis.



Challenges

The matter of the Park District's possible involvement in rescuing and then operating the Jarvis Hunt Mansion as an ongoing business concern boils down to four challenges requiring consideration.

These challenges are as follows:

1. **The Preservation Group's ability to immediately raise the balance of the true cost of moving and restoring the house** – Best Estimate to Date is \$1,237,000 less \$364,000 already identified or \$873,000. Dollars identified as firm are:
 - \$150,000 in impact fees from the development
 - \$114,000 from the City of Wheaton to support the preservation effort
 - \$100,000 from a donor identified through the DuPage Foundation

As of today, the Preservation Group has informed me that they have identified 5 donors who will pledge a total of an additional \$275,000 over 10 years via legally binding pledge agreements.

2. **The short time available for a decision to be made by the park board** – today, or seven days from today, at the absolute latest to meet Pulte's construction time-line and accomplish the advance engineering and foundation construction.

3. **The likelihood that the Mansion, once moved and restored, can generate sufficient net revenue to cover annual operating expenses.** Comparable Facilities and their annual operating expenses are:

➤ Legge Memorial Lodge in Hinsdale	\$213,000
➤ Cheney Mansion in Oak Park	\$176,000
➤ Wilder Mansion in Elmhurst	\$257,000

Using these comparable facilities, I project \$200,000 annually in event and rental revenue will be required to successfully operate the Jarvis Hunt Mansion in a sustainable fashion. Using research and analysis completed by our Events Director at Arrowhead, we project a year one gross revenue figure of \$38,000. This figure assumes a low number of rentals at a lower than average price due to the expectation that the grounds and parts of the interior will be a little rough the first year and into year two depending on fundraising success. Improvements to the grounds and certain aspects of the interior will allow for year two and three increases in pricing and facilitate a number of rentals on par with comparable facilities. I predict by the end of year 3 on the inside, 4 on the outside, that the \$200,000 gross revenue goal can be achieved going forward. An investment of two or three years of deficit spending will need to be made in my opinion.

4. Challenges related to the proposed location including:

- The lack of a parking lot
- The lack of road access to the mansion
- Park neighbor concerns about making an already busy park busier, putting a building on land that is currently an open green space not programmed with athletics, crowd and music noise generated by events and the alcohol consumption that goes along with event rental facilities of this type

The park is already host to hundreds of hours of youth athletic activity taking place Spring through Fall and parking congestion is a common neighbor concern during especially busy weekends, this could be mitigated by a blacking out historically busy weekend days from being available to rent as a re-purposed mansion. The blackout dates concept makes it that much harder to operate it as a sustainable business venture.

Summary and Recommendation

The idea of saving the Jarvis Hunt Mansion from demolition is appealing and, at first blush, the concept of simply moving it 800 feet to the south seemed to be a pragmatic solution to the problem of getting it out of the way of the new Pulte development. Creating an event venue using a re-purposed historic mansion can be a successful business venture over time if it could be properly located with the proper parking and access amenities.

However, the true cost of moving and restoring the mansion along with the challenges of the proposed site and the challenges related to sustainably operating it without overtaxing an already busy park, force me to recommend against continuing the exploration of this proposal as it stands.

While this is not what many here wish to hear, some good news is that the DuPage County Historical Museum Foundation Board commissioned a digital archiving project through photography of the details of the exterior and interior of the Jarvis Hunt Mansion two months ago when news of the demolition was first released. That effort will lead to a DuPage County historic architecture exhibit at this Museum at some point in the future and has insured the preservation of the images of many aspects of the building in perpetuity.

I wish to extend appreciation to Pulte Builders who have been very accommodating and helpful. Also, the City of Wheaton is to be congratulated for offering to share in the preservation expense. The City Staff was very helpful in assessing the true cost of the preservation effort and timing to accomplish it. I applaud the City's commitment to the saving, when possible, aspects of the City's history which is evidenced by the historic DuPage County Courthouse being re-purposed in to condo development.

Thank you to the DuPage Foundation for their assistance in finding a donor match.

I thank the Preservationists for their hard work in a short period of time.

I thank the Park Board for allowing this review of a matter of import to many Residents and the time spent last week and this by them.

Thank you

Attachments

- Report on expectations of expense for the Jarvis Hunt Mansion move and restoration
- Report of Revenue generation potential year one for a re-purposed historic mansion
- Background report on Jarvis Hunt
- Location Proposal Displays

