

Town of University Park

Report of Meeting

Council Committee on Public Facilities and Services

Thursday, October 10, 2013

7:00 pm

University Park Elementary School

Committee Members Present:

Len Carey, Council Member, Ward 4, Chair

Michael Cron, Council Member, Ward 6

James Gekas, Council Member, Ward 2

David Brosch, Council Member, Ward 1

Others Present:

John Tabori, Mayor

Roy Alvarez, Council Member, Ward 7

Suellen Ferguson, Town Attorney

Tom Ahmann, Ahmann Architects LLC

Meeting called to order: 7:00 pm

1. Welcome and Introductions

- Mr. Carey asked that everyone sign in and include their street address and e-mail. As soon as it is available, a link will be sent where a document of questions and answers can be found. The document will also be available on the Town website.
- The following documents were available for review:
 - 2009 Space Usage Study of Town Hall (possible expansion)
 - Architectural drawings of Riverdale Presbyterian Church
 - Zoning study

2. Decision process and timeline

In 2009 a Space Usage Study Program of Expansion was done by Ahmann Architects. The Council, at that time, shelved the plan. In October, 2012 a representative from the Church discussed the possibility of a long-term lease with Mayor Tabori and Mr. Carey. In April 2013, the Council was informed that the Church was interested in selling the Church to the Town. On June 17, 2013 the Council introduced a transfer of funds to pay for an appraisal of Riverdale Presbyterian Church. On July 1, the Council approved the transfer of funds and on July 30 the appraisal was completed. The Council met in Special Session on August 22, 2013 and voted 7/0 to move forward on considering that position

of Riverdale Presbyterian Church. The matter was referred to the Council Committee on Public Facilities and Services.

On August 29, 2013 the Council Committee on Public Facilities and Services met to discuss the possible acquisition. It was recommended that this be a transparent process and that there be a series of community conversations, October 10 being the first of this series. The next community meetings have been scheduled for December 5, 2013 and January 18, 2014 and will be held at the Riverdale Presbyterian Church.

The Committee arranged to contract for evaluations of the building. Proposals went out on October 8 and the bids are due on October 25. On October 28, the Council will review the contracts.

- checking for hazardous substances
- major systems (HVAC, plumbing, electrical work)
- sustainability aspects
- construction cost

The Committee is pushing for a Council decision on the possible acquisition of Riverdale Presbyterian Church by January 20, 2014, where the Council will be asked to vote.

At this time, Mr. Carey answered what the Town, so far, knows:

- The Church states that the transfer of ownership will take place
- The Church expressed interest in a lease-back of the sanctuary and three offices behind it for a period of five to ten years, including occasional use of the hall that sits below the sanctuary
- There has been no discussion of numbers, price or cost
- The Church property sits on 1.6 acres; square footage of the Church and Annex is approximately 27,000

3. Ground Rules

Mr. Carey encouraged everyone to write their questions on the index card provided and to forward them to the Recording Secretary. These will be reviewed and answered as soon as possible. Comments and questions can be e-mailed to rpcpurchase@upmd.org.

4. Community Comments and Questions

- **Carol Martin - Woodberry Street.** It might be helpful to get clarification on a capital purchase vs. on-going operational purchase. What will happen in the alternative if we don't pursue a purchase of this property and what impact that might have on the community?
- **Bruce Burrows - East West Highway.** Consider an audio/video control room where the town meetings can be broadcasted. The focus should be on how to

improve the function of the town. Is the protocol that's going to be used to evaluate the property going to be specified?

- **Gary Kraske - Van Buren Street.** This is an expensive and somewhat risky investment. Reliable steady revenue generated such as apartments for senior living or scholars from UM, in order to have some financial back-up. Cash-flow possibilities.

Mr. Ahmann stated that the permitted uses of the property are limited for an R-55 zone. A list of what is allowed and not allowed is available on the table in the back.

At this time, Mr. Carey explained that the individual members of the Public Facilities and Service Committee are focusing on the following subjects:

David Brosch - possible future usages of the space

Michael Cron - tracking the costs

Jim Gekas - grants and other sources of revenues

- **John Brunner - Tennyson Road.** Did any of the appraisals include handicap accessibility?

Mr. Ahmann stated that the architect is looking at code issues, zoning issues and building condition issues and handicap accessible is code. The appraisal that was given was a financial one; the process ongoing now is an analysis of all the other elements.

If there is a move to the Church, the equipment, tractor, buses, etc. should not follow, since this sort of equipment does not belong in the middle of town.

Mayor Tabori and Town staff are currently looking into this issue.

- **Edda Osborne - Wells Parkway.** Will there be an increase of taxes and what could happen to the property if the town does not purchase it?

Mr. Carey stated that with the 1.6 acres of land there, it would be possible to put six single family homes on that lot.

- **Kitty Donnelly - Sheridan Street.** The Church has functioned as a community center, informally for the entire town, (Boy and Girl Scouts, yoga classes, etc.) and this is through the generosity of the Church. The loss of this space should be considered, if the church is not acquired by the town.

- **Linda Verrill - Van Buren Street.** Is there any information, at all, about potential grants?

Mr. Gekas will be looking into State, FEMA, and MEMA grants.

- **Eddie Rivas - Queens Chapel Road.** Suggests “transitional housing” temporary housing for those coming out of the hospital and this could be supported by the health department and the local hospitals. Another idea would be to create a village in which neighbors would support neighbors.
- **Fred Werth - Pineway.** Concern of the age of the Church and the cost to repair and replace.
- **Carol Cron - Underwood Street.** Will the town be applying for two different grant opportunities?

Mayor Tabori explained that Bond Bills are grants from the state with no expectation to pay back. The other grants would be operational funds. There is two aspects, one is that they would provide us with funds to operate the program or they would in fact come in and operate a program, lease it from us and pay us some amount of money. These options have not been looked into closely. Currently looking into the FEMA grant, which requires the property, is used to shelter people in case of an emergency. FEMA would pay up to 80% of the portion of the property that would be a sheltering place. A program called Project Open Space Fund is being looked into which could be used for recreation purposes such as yoga classes.

- **Dusan Schejbal - 41st Street.** Current Town Hall is great, why this purchase?
- **Paul Essex - Woodberry Street.** What are the undesirable things that people might put in the Church property if we don't buy it? Why can't the school house be used in lieu of the Church for meetings and boy scouts, yoga classes, etc.? What's wrong with building six new houses?
- **Peter Ripley - Pineway.** What, specifically, is the Town's debt limit? The decision should not be based on the possibility of grants, if the Town cannot afford it, then do not purchase it.

Mayor Tabori said that there are two limits; 25% of the operating budget and 60% of total budgeted expenditures of about \$4.9 million.

- **Gretchen Luchsinger - Underwood Street.** If the town doesn't acquire the property, how much control do we have on what goes on there?

Ms. Ferguson explained that the Town has no control over who can purchase the Church. There is only a code enforcement law.

- **JoAnn Fletcher - Van Buren Street.** The other Churches in University Park would be more than willing to accommodate the Boy and Girl Scout meetings and other activities.
- **Bridget Warren—Van Buren Street.** Consider middle grounds, whereby the Church land is purchased, the Church leases back as long as necessary and seeks in development.
- **Bruce Burrows—East-West Highway.** An expansion to Town Hall may be the best solution since it would be designed exactly as wanted.
- **Debra Suarez - Woodberry Street.** If the Town wants to make this purchase, that's fine, but a few people should not make the decision for everybody.

Mr. Carey: Is there a procedure within the town's Charter for the Council to send this to referendum?

Ms. Ferguson explained that there is no procedure in the charter. where a matter may be sent to referendum prior to the Council voting on an issue and adopting an ordinance. The Town will not be able to acquire this property without adopting an ordinance, because that's what's required to do that.

- **Debra Suarez - Woodberry Street.** What is the legal process that the Town must follow?

Ms. Ferguson explained that under Maryland state law, you may not take an action of a quorum of the council, unless it's a public meeting for which it's been advertised in the usual course.

Mixing public funds and religious purposes?

As long as the religious group is treated the same as other groups, such as a rental fee.

What kinds of costs will we incur with all the different uses of the Church?

- **Bridget Warren, Van Buren Street.** Consider a charter change for a purchase of this type or any large decision that could impact the entire town.
- **Carol Martin - Woodberry Street.** Look at issues that will bring value to the community.

- **Ginny May - Queens Chapel Road.** What is the appraisal? When will the Town find out what price the Church is asking?

Mr. Carey stated that the appraisal is not being released at this time because it is part of a negotiation which is ongoing. There has been no discussion with the Church in terms of numbers.

- **Jill Fosse - Van Buren Street.** What will happen with Town Hall? Suggestion would be to sell the current Town Hall and use the money to offset the purchase of the Church.

Mr. Carey said that there has been some discussion on this topic which would be to either rent or sell the property.

Meeting adjourned: 8:30 pm

Questions/comments submitted via Index Card

What type of grants are available from the State and for what purpose, i.e., building a town hall, community center, etc?

What type of grants are available from the Federal Government and for what purpose (i.e., FEMA, HHS for day care, elder care).

Consider revenue generation, ideas to assist in carrying charges for property: Bond issuance at current low interest very attractive. gkraske@hotmail.com

Taxes - How much higher? Financing. If we don't buy - what problems would be faced by our community, if bought by a person/group with a mind to use the space for purposes not agreeable to us? Edda Osborne