

**Gas Holder Committee  
Meeting #1  
Held via Zoom in accordance with Governor’s Sununu’s Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive  
Order 2020-04  
September 10, 2020  
APPROVED MINUTES**

In attendance:

Committee: Councilors Champlin, Kenison, Kretovic, Todd, and Werner

Invited Guests: Ben Wilson (NHDHR); Huck Montgomery (Liberty Utilities); Tim Sink (Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce); Bill Norton (Norton Asset Management); Elizabeth Durfee Hengen (Preservation Consultant); Frank Lemay (Milestone Construction)

City Staff: Carlos P. Baía, Deputy City Manager for Development

*Meeting called to order at 2:03 p.m.*

Roll was taken and the invited guests introduced.

Chairman Champlin summarized the findings of the recent GZA study of the Gas Holder building commissioned by Liberty Utilities and the City of Concord. He noted the alternatives were:

1. Demolition;
2. Preservation of the building as a monument;
3. Re-use of the building

Huck Montgomery of Liberty Utilities explained that the building is in danger of imminent collapse and that Liberty is moving forward with plans to demolish the structure. Mr. Montgomery noted, however, that Liberty would be ready to “turn on a dime” if the committee devised a viable alternative. He also stated that Liberty Utilities owns the environmental liability in perpetuity and, as such, is particularly sensitive to plans that could impact the contamination on the site or increase its liability.

Mr. Montgomery explained that Liberty’s estimate for demolition of the building is \$500,000. This would have to come from the ratepayers. Liberty would likely be amenable to supporting the use of this same \$500,000 for a viable alternative assuming that the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) supported such an option. Mr. Montgomery noted that for this scenario to happen, Liberty would need the advocacy of the committee at the PUC. He noted that this process could take some time.

Tim Sink suggested that it might be best to start that process sooner rather than later. Mr. Montgomery stated that Liberty would be open to that strategy. Mr. Montgomery suggested, however, that the PUC would likely be more amenable to this option if there was a fairly developed plan and not simply speculation of a future, undetermined project.

Councilor Kretovic stated that if the PUC did not allow the \$500,000 to be used for a project, she wanted it to be clear that the default was not demolition.

Bill Norton stated that it could cost \$3 million to re-purpose this building. For that to happen, he envisioned a strategy of stacking various capital sources. He suggested perhaps pursuing the monument option at this time and working toward a future project.

Jennifer Goodman noted that phasing will be important with this project. It's not just the building; it's the entire site that is up for re-purposing.

Frank Lemay stated that one alternative that might work for a site with sub-surface contamination is podium construction where a deck of parking is built over the ground surface with a steel frame structure above. In essence, Mr. Lemay saw this as a possible air rights project. He wondered if Liberty would accept such a project.

Mr. Montgomery stated that Liberty wouldn't dismiss anything at this point but reminded the committee that the environmental liability is significant and whatever end use would need to be vetted by the company.

Mr. Wilson asked about the extent of the site's sub-surface environmental contamination. Mr. Montgomery stated that he would inquire with his colleagues about this matter.

Ms. Goodman suggested the consultancy group of Stu Arnett to work with the committee on this project. Mr. Norton also recommended Plan New Hampshire as another resource. The committee's consensus was to recommend that the City Council on Monday approve the \$20,000 appropriation for this work and direct the City Manager and Deputy City Manager for Development to take the committee's recommendation and secure the appropriate consultant.

Councilor Kenison asked Jon Chorlian for his thoughts as a developer of historic properties. Mr. Chorlian stated that this is only a 5,000 square foot building but any project to re-use it would be staggeringly expensive on a square foot basis. He did not see how such an expensive project could recoup the necessary value to make it financially feasible in Concord.

The committee discussed whom to invite as subject matter experts or individuals that have expressed interest in redeveloping the site in the past. Names included Jim Garvin, Alex Ray, Dick Anagnost, and George Bald.

Councilor Kretovic stated that if this building is demolished it will have a devastating impact on the community akin to what happened with the razing of the train station.

The committee agreed to meet in two weeks and have that as an opportunity for the subject matter experts to provide their input.

Ms. Goodman will circulate the building's National Register application which has a tremendous amount of information about the building and its history.

Councilor Kenison emphasized that when the committee gets to the point of scheduling a public charrette/input session, that all efforts must be made to have the meeting publicized broadly. Councilor Werner recommended reaching out to David Brooks at the Concord Monitor as well.

Meeting adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carlos P. Baía