

**Gas Holder Building Committee
Meeting #5
November 20, 2020
9:00 a.m.
Meeting held via Zoom
APPROVED MINUTES**

Committee members in attendance:

Councilors Champlin, Kenison, Kretovic, Todd, and Werner

Guests:

Jennifer Goodman, Stuart Arnett, Liz Hengen, Tim Sink, Ben Wilson, Huck Montgomery

City staff:

Deputy City Manager Carlos Baía

Meeting called to order at 9:04 am

Councilor Champlin read the required COVID opening statement per the Governor's order.

1. Approval of the minutes of October 16, 2020:

Jennifer Goodman suggested the following clarifying replacement wording for the last paragraph on page 2:

Ms. Goodman asked the committee to consider that certain funding or incentives could be available if the redevelopment met preservation standards like the Secretary of the Interior Standards.

Motion made by Councilor Kretovic; Seconded by Councilor Todd to accept the minutes with the correction noted. Motion approved, in roll call vote, by Councilors Champlin, Kenison, Kretovic, Todd and Werner.

2. Summary of Public Input from Recent Forums:

Ms. Goodman stated that the Preservation Alliance had received an extraordinary response from the public despite the short notice. In the two forums the Alliance has hosted, 75% of the attendees were Concord residents and included members of city committees, the Heritage Commission and City staff. Ms. Goodman thanked everyone for their participation.

3. Refining Options from Research and Public Input to Date

Stu Arnett shared a PowerPoint slide presentation. He noted that his team is looking at this draft report as a type of feasibility analysis. He explained that there are 4 key considerations in any scenario for the gas holder property: money, market, people, and place.

He admitted that there are still a lot of unknowns. For example, he noted that his team does not yet know what it will cost to stabilize the building for this upcoming winter. He also does not know what it would cost to redevelop the interior of the building as that will be largely dependent on the type of ultimate use. He also does not know what the cost of the site redevelopment would be. He noted that a redevelopment plan that includes extraction of contaminated material could be expensive.

Barring extraction of site sub-soil materials, he did state that any development on the property would need to be on pads or have limited foundations. This could exclude potential re-uses.

Mr. Arnett outlined three primary models for redevelopment. Model A would be confined to the existing property and would contemplate the Gas Holder Building preserved as part of a heritage/education/museum complex. A second building could be erected on site that could house a themed museum. One of the challenges from this model would be the significant grade difference from a new lower level parking lot up to the Gas Holder building. This could pose issues for people trying to make their way up to the structure and require substantial ramping. He also noted that themed museums require significant subsidy and have struggled.

Model B assumes a greater development area that could incorporate neighboring property to the north which could house a third building. A number of the other challenges from Model A remain with this option.

Model C contemplates a more holistic vision where property to the north is incorporated but becomes park space opening up the view corridor to the corner of South Main and Water street. This model is a “hub and spoke” approach where the Gas Holder building would serve as a trail head for future development of the South End including the South End Marsh property off of Langdon Avenue. Mr. Arnett suggested that the Concord Coach maintenance facility on Langdon Avenue could be expanded to include a new bus terminal. He also stated that the large blue-siding clad building off of Langdon Avenue could be converted to housing. He noted that the brownfield issues throughout this corridor could be mitigated by the fact that the properties in this area are on public water.

Mr. Arnett outlined the following actions steps:

1. Site needs to be secured in the short term;
2. The committee should continue to collect info and reconcile cost differences from the various scenarios. For example, what will the PUC allow to go on the Liberty bills in terms of costs from this project;
3. Reduce some of the unknowns;
4. Prepare a realistic business plan for a chosen scenario;
5. Convene Liberty and the City into a working group to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by March 1st.

Councilor Kretovic asked for clarification on the underground utilities in the South End Marsh area. She understood that they were private and not connected to City's system. Deputy City Manager Baia noted that the properties themselves are connected to City water but that there is a maze of private pipes once on the property that need to be looked at.

Huck Montgomery expressed interest in the idea of an MOU but urged the parties to start work on it as soon as possible. He reminded the committee that Liberty's intention is to seek a demolition permit by year's end unless there is some alternative direction from this committee process. He stated that the City can have the property but that Liberty's obligations for remediation and mitigation can not be transferred. These obligations remain Liberty's in perpetuity. As such, he would foresee that any MOU would require significant legal review.

Mr. Arnett clarified that he was counting on an MOU being adopted by March but expected the process to start much sooner than that. Mr. Montgomery noted that Liberty is ready to start that process immediately.

Liz Hengen asked if there was any way to provide handicapped access from the South Main Street side of the building rather than having to accommodate it from a lower parking lot. Mr. Arnett clarified that the design he showed actually contemplated a bay of handicapped parking on the street precisely for that reason. Mr. Arnett did note that the bigger question was how to make the interior of the Gas Holder building accessible once people are inside.

Mr. Sink asked if there was any plan to plug the hole in the roof prior to this winter. Mr. Montgomery noted that stabilization can't be done in a piece-meal fashion. The total stabilization of the building was estimated at \$1.5-2 million range. Mr. Sink clarified that he was suggesting something as minimal as a tarp over the roof.

Mr. Montgomery stated that the structural engineer retained by the Preservation Alliance is scheduled to assess the building on December 1st. He proposed that the Preservation Alliance ask the engineer what value a tarp might have to preserve the building for this winter or if there are other cost-effective measures that could be taken in the short term. He noted that Liberty would not have any problem placing a tarp on the roof.

Ms. Goodman stated that she would broach that with the engineer and also include Frank Lemay in the discussion.

At this point, Councilor Champlin opened up the floor to questions from the public. Councilor Pierce asked if the removal of the internal mechanism in the building would diminish its historical value. Ms. Goodman responded that the goal is to retain as much of the building as possible.

Ben Wilson added that an LCHIP review for grant funding would look seriously at a grant application that maintained the internal mechanism.

Jim Schlosser, a resident of Badger Street, noted that the City's 2006 Opportunity Corridor Plan is very interesting and it has allowed him and others to contemplate what is possible in this area.

Councilor Champlin read a question from attendee John Swift who asked if a resident could volunteer to accompany the structural engineer in his assessment and/or help with the work to stabilize the roof.

Mr. Montgomery expressed appreciation for the offer but answered that Liberty could not allow that due to safety and liability issues.

Councilor Champlin closed the public input portion of the agenda and recommended that the committee's next meeting—originally scheduled for December 4th—be postponed by 1-2 weeks to allow for the structural engineer's assessment and report to be completed, reviewed and incorporated into Mr. Arnett's final report to the committee. The committee was in consensus that this was an acceptable recommendation.

Councilor Champlin thanked everyone for participating and Mr. Arnett for his work to date. He noted that Mr. Arnett will provide the committee members with the slide deck presented today and asked that it be made available to the public. Ms. Goodman stated that she will have it added to the Preservation Alliance's website and Mr. Baía noted that the City can provide a link to it from the City's website.

Meeting adjourned at 10:14 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carlos P. Baía