



Courthouse Reuse Committee

Special Meeting

353 N Generals Blvd. Lincolnton, NC 28092

February 26th, 2021

10:00 a.m.

Agenda

1. Welcome

2. Introduction of Guests

- a. *Jason Harpe* - Richard Grubb and Associates, Inc. (Local Historian and Historic Preservation Consultant)

Introduction and overview of expertise was provided along with ideas and offerings for services of the consultant.

- b. *Sen. Ted Alexander* - Preservation North Carolina (Private Nonprofit Statewide Historic Preservation Consultant)

Introduction and overview of the Senator and his experience with Preservation North Carolina as a Nonprofit who often takes ownership of historic properties and then sells them with restrictive covenants to protect the historical value and asset of the property.

The Senator offered ideas for potential partnerships and provided brochures on how the committee could continue exploring ways to preserve the building while also enhancing its economic and community development status.

- c. *Mike Norris, Jim Ford, LuAnn Bryan* – McGill and Associates, P.A. (Diverse Engineering and Design Firm)

McGill and Associates, P.A. were invited to the meeting based on their current projects with the City and County on the Parks and Recreation Master Plan to help provide input as to how to navigate the process of a city streetscape design that could potentially impact the use of the court square very positively. The firm mentioned the current traffic pattern, discussed pedestrian safety, and

presented creative ways to enhance the accessibility of the square while keeping visitors safe.

3. Special Topics / Discussion

a. History

A brief history and overview of how the building had been utilized by the court system was provided by Facilities Services including the previous courthouse that stood on the property from the late 1850s. The plans for the new courthouse have created a need to investigate opportunities to reuse or renovate the building.

The county manager mentioned that several capital improvement projects have been completed by the county in the past 3 to 5 years and several are underway currently. These improvements and facility moves have eliminated the need for the building to be used by the courts any further and have also eliminated the need for the building to be used to house any sort of county offices.

b. Possibilities and Ideas for the building

The recent Library space needs study was referenced, and the County Manager and Facilities Director mentioned in conversations with the Library Director that to operate a Library out of this building would be costly, primarily due to staffing concerns for three floors plus a basement. Sight lines for visibility on each of the three floors were also mentioned as well as the sloping floor on the 2nd level not being able to house bookshelves, and creating ADA accessibility concerns for the public.

Discussion of the building being used solely as a museum was discussed. Committee members offered that the current museum was lacking many visitors and substantial operating hours. Discussion surrounding the inclusion of historic displays and elements of the Lincoln Historical Association's collection from the Museum of History was referenced. Several members mentioned that regardless of the final use, that some level of historical artifacts and local art should be displayed where feasible.

Commissioner Davis mentioned that residential on the top floor was not an option. Several other members agreed including City Council Member Poinsette and felt that there would be too many hurdles to having residential in the building. Discussion by LEDA and the Chamber of Commerce of downtown residential and loft apartments above the commercial spaces downtown was becoming popular and that it was desired in certain areas where building codes can be met. The group still provided consensus for consideration of seeing how residential may turn out once further studied.

The County Manager referenced the report created by staff and stated that one vision could be to be different from the other counties and cities around us. To not copy what others are doing by having only a museum. But, to have a mixture of uses and include space for a history museum either in one location of the building or potentially to scatter certain elements about. Chamber of Commerce and City Council members mentioned that plenty of people have created a museum in their downtowns, but that

to create something that had a mixture of uses including retail, restaurant space, and history could be a good combination.

The Arts Council representative mentioned potentially having a pottery museum and/or studio space. Discussion about Catawba Valley pottery was held among the group and it was discussed to at least consider this as part of one of the spaces or to potentially have art or pottery throughout the building similar to the discussion of the museum elements.

The City Manager referenced the potential for an event venue or conference space within the building and shoppes on the first floor. The Chamber of Commerce and LEDA staff mentioned the potential need for banquets and community events that could be housed within the building.

The group provided that a consensus majority wanted to continue to explore a mixture of options for the building and wanted to investigate how the building could be self-sustaining from local residents while also attracting visitors from out of town and to be a destination. Several members of the group stated that the focus should be on creating something unique that will attract visitors and create tourism rather than something that will not be utilized or would be a burden on the local downtown economy, such as a museum or library.

c. Possibilities and Ideas for the grounds / green space

Discussion of the court square potentially becoming a one-lane instead of two has been discussed with NCDOT well before any plans were discussed for the court square. McGill and Associates provided some insight into how that element of the project long term could provide for additional safety measures for the public and provide for a very walkable downtown for the City of Lincolnton which would have a positive impact on the use of the former courthouse building.

Commissioner Davis and Mitchem asked staff to bring renderings to the next meeting to discuss some sketches and options. Chamber of Commerce and DDA referenced lighting for outdoor dining from the restaurants on the square such as Court Street Grille. City Council members mentioned having a pavilion or a small amphitheater for performances, or outdoor weddings. City Parks and Rec mentioned having benches and seating areas for people to just enjoy the grounds.

Commissioner Davis and staff agreed that there is much to discuss with regards to the grounds and that the use of the grounds needs to compliment the uses on the interior. Foot traffic needs to be considered and access to the square and the adjacent parking lots and crosswalks. McGill and Associates and the City Manager mentioned that new crosswalk design would be a part of the eventual City Streetscape Plan.

d. Potential Funding Sources or partnerships.

Staff presented some potential options and grant opportunities as well as ownership structures that are available in NC that could provide some sense of financial stability for the project. This topic was discussed very lightly and then requested to be tabled until a future meeting once a further direction on use was determined.

4. Action Items and follow up

The group decided to move forward with an agenda and PowerPoint presentation style of meeting procedure seeing as future meetings would be centered around the review of data and presentation material from different groups and consultants.

- Renderings / Sketches
- Staff research

5. Adjourn